

Trades Can Often Be A Good Sale

by Cyrus Afzali - September 11, 2008

To public relations professionals, dropping the names of top-tier outlets in which they've secured clips for their clients is a sort of "A list" approach to selling. While it does indeed make for an impressive feat in many ways, it's not always the best method over the long term.

It's understandable that clients like to see their names in top-tier publications like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*. Simply put, meeting that bar gives a sense of validation to a company that sets it apart from its competitors. While they will unquestionably raise a company's visibility level, their impact on sales in many cases won't be all that dramatic.

To put it in simple terms, let's reflect on the old, familiar slogan used by *USA Today*, which is "not the most words, just the right ones." I think it makes sense to look at media outlets and campaigns in the same way. While it's natural to take pride over having your name seen by hundreds of thousands, or perhaps even millions of readers, stop and consider how many of those readers are prospective customers of your client's product or service? In all likelihood, there's a good chance that number is relatively small. This, of course, is especially true in the case of a company that sells primarily to businesses and not consumers.

Trades serve a much narrower, more focused audience; while their circulation is definitely smaller, many are widely read in their industries by key executives who turn to them for the latest in product developments and a whole host of industry news. Another big benefit of trade publications are reader-service cards. They provide actual sales prospects because readers actually go the extra step of volunteering to receive more information on a featured company's product or service.

Even better, most publications will send you periodic reports containing a detailed list of sales prospects who've submitted those cards. This information can easily be imported into a company's database for sales tracking purposes. In addition to the obvious benefit of having actual names and contact information for prospective customers, the feedback allows a sales team to put together a sort of "geographic hit list" based on the sales inquiries. This allows them to spend more time chasing qualified prospects rather than cold calling or some other method that doesn't yield much efficiency. So, for example, a client can often say that a specific story in a trade publication generated X number of leads and that translated into X number of sales.

Trade publications also often make for great case studies, since placements in them will generate qualified leads and sales. For example, I've been able to craft a number of successful "David vs. Goliath" story pitches that have resulted in stories chronicling how a small company in an industry vertical dominated by one or more large companies found a niche that separated them from the competition. By using a time-tested formula that presents a problem and goes on to describe how a company solved it, case studies serve as a sort of "how to" road map that other companies can follow. Think of it as the corporate America version of "news you can use." Just as traditional media outlets love those kinds of stories, business and trade publications often do as well.

Another obvious benefit trades provide is the opportunity to expand your media target horizon. For every sector that a company sells to, there's almost certainly a fair number of publications that track the industry. By getting to know the publications, their editors/reporters and what they write about, you can create several pitches with each one containing specific information about how your client addresses a key need businesses in the industry have.

Unfortunately for PR pros and their clients alike, many PR counselors are afraid to give any kind of counsel that does anything but parrot and cheer on what the client says they want. So, for example, if the client says they want *The New York Times*, their PR pro in most cases says, "sure, we'll go get it." Again, high-level placements can indeed be very valuable; that said, just as much time should be spent ensuring your reaching a proper target audience and that's where trades play a key role.